

# Pandemic Flu: A Stress Management Guide

As our nation prepares for a pandemic flu, it is natural that we would feel some stress in considering the consequences. This guide will assist us in preparing emotionally and behaviorally for a pandemic flu. The guide provides some of the common indicators of stress and explains ways to deal with our concerns as we prepare for a pandemic event.

## LEARN:

- Educating ourselves about the challenges of a pandemic and its effects on our lives, including home, school, work, economy and infrastructure can assist us in handling the day-to-day hardships we will endure.
- Finding out about school and work plans will help us prepare personally.
- We will need to juggle the need for information in monitoring news reports with the additional anxiety that too much media viewing can cause.
- Learning symptoms, knowing how the flu is spread and knowing possible risk groups will aid us in monitoring ourselves and family members during an actual outbreak.
- Understanding social distancing and teaching it to our children will assist in prevention. For example,
  - ✓ Maintaining the recommended distance between ourselves and others can be taught to children using a yardstick or ruler
  - ✓ Learning the best times to shop when stores are less crowded
  - ✓ Identifying businesses who have drive-up windows
  - ✓ Practicing good cough etiquette
  - ✓ Using our own pens when registering at doctor's offices, etc.

## PLAN:

- Preparedness can reduce our risks and consequently our fears.
- Following good health practices for ourselves and our children and supporting each other emotionally on an ongoing basis will help us handle future illnesses.

## PROTECT:

- Even when we try to protect ourselves and loved ones, some of us will get the pandemic flu and become seriously ill or die. We should not allow ourselves to assume unwarranted guilt when this occurs.
- People may show fear and misunderstanding to those who have recovered from the illness, persons living with those who have the flu, or those working as first responders. We can become educated and offer support to those working on behalf of our health and safety. Try to understand without condemning persons who practice stigmatizing behaviors. Determine how to reduce the impact of such behavior by:
  - ✓ Encouraging family and friends to become educated on pandemic preparedness.
  - ✓ Considering in advance the actions you may take to lessen the impact of stigma.
  - ✓ Explaining to children that these behaviors may occur and what to do.

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- Fear is a natural human emotion. Now, as in a pandemic event, our fear can be fed by dread, awareness, unfamiliarity, the scale of the pandemic and identification with victims. We can choose to overcome our fears of a pandemic by making a plan, taking action to help others plan, taking breaks from thinking about it, talking with others and practicing stress management through prayer, meditation, breathing or relaxation.

## NORMAL REACTIONS TO ABNORMAL SITUATIONS:

Understanding the stressors that we may feel as we consider the impact of pandemic flu and especially as we respond to the illness itself will assist us in understanding our own reactions and those of others. Both adults and children may have some of the following reactions:

**Emotional:** Shock, anger, guilt, terror, helplessness, despair

**Cognitive:** Confusion, memory loss, blaming, poor concentration

**Behavioral:** Isolation, change in sleeping patterns and eating habits

**Physical:** Fatigue, headaches, hair loss, increased heartbeat, stomachaches

**Spiritual:** May become more spiritual or withdrawn or become angry at God

## TAKING ACTION:

- Learn what you can do in advance. Create a plan and then lead your lives in a normal way.
- Build resilience in yourself and your children's lives by learning to identify emotions and positive ways to respond behaviorally.
- Know that our daily lives may be significantly different during a pandemic. Doing something to help others helps us.
- Be involved in faith-based and other community organizations and identify ways that the groups can maintain communication, commitment and outreach.
- Work with neighbors/family members with special needs regarding their personal and the facility's pandemic emergency plan to identify additional preparedness efforts you can undertake.
- Seek support from family, friends and colleagues.
- Make use of available community services.
- Continue your daily schedule at work and leisure activities.
- Seek professional mental health assistance if things are falling apart, you feel depressed, there is no medical explanation for chronic physical problems, or you feel hopelessness or extreme anger. There is help available to assist you in getting through.

For more information, refer to "*Preparing for Pandemic Flu: A Community Guide*" at <http://www.dhss.mo.gov/PandemicInfluenza/>.

